I Go South

Harry Shumway

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I GO SOUTH

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GATHERING THE WHITE NUGGETS

I GO SOUTH

An Unprejudiced Visit to a Group of Cotton Mills

BY
HARRY SHUMWAY

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS FROM
PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR

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INTRODUCTION

TWENTY years ago, Carleton R. Richmond and I were in college together. Our paths have diverged. He sits in a Boston office, where he acts as Assistant Treasurer of the West Point Manufacturing Company, a group of cotton mills in the South. I am a writer. About a year ago, we met on a train.

'Got anything good to read?' I asked him.

'No,' he said. 'I want to read something good about the cotton business — something that would tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth about the people who grow cotton, and the people who spin and weave it in the South. The Southern mills represent billion dollar investment. But all the books I read are just crowded with prejudice. Every writer wants to prove something, instead of reporting conditions as they are.'

We talked for a time. Eventually it was suggested by Richmond that I might go South, look over a large group of mills, and write a straightforward report.

I declined, because I knew I should be a prejudiced witness. My own family have been in the cotton business; some of them are in it now. Finally I suggested that we could find a man, somewhere, who had no prejudices of any sort. The search for him took months. But we

found him at last in Wollaston, Massachusetts, and he is the author of this book.

Harry Shumway has never worked in a cotton mill. He lives in a two-family house, which he designed himself and helped to build. He is an able carpenter. He is also a capitalist on a small scale, because he leases the other half of his house. The rest of the time he is a writer, and a good one. His short stories appear in a long list of magazines. He belongs to no labor union. He is not a director or officer of any corporation. He owns no stocks; all his savings are in life insurance and bonds.

He is as free from prejudices as any human being can be. His mind is like a piece of photographic film, ready to receive impressions.

'If you will go South and write a truthful book on conditions as you see them,' I said, 'I am sure it will make a great impression on some publisher, and on the whole reading public too.'

'All right,' answered Shumway, in his New England voice. 'When does the first train leave for Alabama? I've never been south of Trenton, New Jersey, but it looks like a real chance to me. I'll be packing my toothbrush while you 'phone to the depot.'

So he went South on December 16, 1929, spent a long time among the mill workers and managers in towns where Richmond introduced him, and here is his book.

HARFORD POWEL, JR.

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I GO SOUTH

CHAPTER I

I GO SOUTH

In my neck of the woods, which is New England, people still use a homely phrase: 'I want to know.'

The accent is always placed on the last word of that short sentence, the 'know.'

It was in just this spirit that I went South. I am not going to give any of my opinions, or notions. That curse, Misinformation, is born of opinions which result from the often faulty observations of those who give it out. When it is frequently repeated, Misinformation gathers strange contours and untruthful lines. Worse still is that brand of Misinformation that is not backed up by observation at all.

Toward the end of November, 1929, a group of Boston business men asked me to go down to Alabama, and write what I saw about a group of five cotton mills for which they are selling agents.

'Why select me?' I asked. 'I know nothing whatever about cotton mill conditions in the South. I don't even know about them in the North.'

'Great,' they said, much pleased. 'You're a Yankee,

a novelist, an unbiased and unopinionated person who is trained to write about people. You'll go with an open mind and tell us what you see and hear.'

Out of this short conversation this book was born — and I didn't know I was writing a book at all. I thought I was making a private, confidential report. Every evening, in the South, I sat down and wrote a long letter to Boston, while facts and impressions were fresh in my mind. And those letters are the book. I have seen it through the press myself; nothing has been added, nothing taken out.

My business friends have decided that a confidential report is exactly what should appear in book covers, for the world to read.

When I boarded the Colonial Express for West Point, Georgia, I couldn't clear my mind of a picture of orange groves, broiling turquoise skies, and darkies strumming banjoes in the moonlight on the old levee.

I had never been south of Philadelphia in my life. I hummed the song about taking the choo-choo for Alabam. I was in luck. This was a grand warming interlude away from the cold New England winter. Ought I to have taken white flannels? Were tropical fevers to be feared? Would I grow so languid, down in the warmth, that I could never buckle down to a ten-hour working-day again?

It was raining. Gloomy weather. I whiled away the

hours on the train wondering about the land I was soon to see. Stepping over any boundary always gives a man a thrill. And stepping over the Mason and Dixon Line has always been pretty thrilling to a Northerner.

I saw the South first from the window of my berth. The train jolted to a stop, at a very small place. There was only one man in sight, and he had to be there. He had a stop sign in his hand. He was like a ghost in the hazy moonlight at the crossing. Manassas. I read the name on a board. Immediately I knew it was connected with some battle in the Civil War. How calm, how still was that sleepy village in the mellow haze of the moon, and the faintly rolling mist. It was hard to picture that once the tramp of thousands of determined feet had rumbled there. Yet the spirit of the great battle was still hovering about, like a faint perfume. The engine shuddered, shook its cars as a playful terrier shakes a rag doll, and slowly rolled us away.

The next view of the South was really South. High Point, North Carolina. It was very different.

The soil was reddish and looked 'loose.' Gullies veined it everywhere. The houses were small and nearly always needed paint. They looked odd. Soon I realized why. They were raised on brick or stone posts, instead of having an all-around foundation of stone or concrete. Everywhere through the South, small houses are built in this way on posts about one and one half feet above the

ground. All day we rolled through a landscape which never changed. The reddish dirt, the rain-washed gullies were everywhere, under a soft autumn coloring which needed only a few blues to make it look a panorama in pastel.

There came a change though. Cotton fields! The first I had ever seen. Stems and leaves were withered and brown and the white tufts of cotton looked like the remnants of a soft snow almost gone. It was late in the season. Most of the crop had been picked. But here and there were pickers in a field bending over the plants and filling their sacks in groups of twos and threes. We never ran out of such scenes all the way down to Alabama. Now and then the train stopped, and we dusty passengers got off to sniff some fresh air. The air was not warm.

I saw a turkey buzzard floating in the sky. I had been told that I would see many of them in the South, and much red clay. Buzzards were few, but clay was plentiful. It looked like soft rust under the brown and green foliage.

Once in a while we saw cotton mills. I was told that one town had one hundred and four, grouped around it. That sounded as if Cotton were still King.

To a New Englander, the absence of big and little buildings for making things was startling. Up North if you miss a factory from a train window, you are sure to spot another before you draw another breath. Every-

thing from machine-shops to catsup factories. We just have to make things in buildings and have smoke coming out of our buildings and have signs to tell the passers-by about them.

The landscape of the South is surprisingly free from our Northern crop of billions of billboards, shouting their colorful best about this and that article. In fact, it looks as if many people had left it many years ago and had gone away somewhere. One hears that the workers in the cotton mills in the South are people who have left their farms in the hills. At any rate, the country for miles and miles has that look. They have gone away. Shacks are standing there as if awaiting; maybe people will come back again. It is a waiting landscape.

And when we do pass a farm, with people, such a lot of paint is needed! The buildings, both dwellings and barns, are weatherbeaten. Barns lean, as if they are very tired, and there seems to be a good inch between each upright board for the wind to whistle through. My eyes, accustomed to long straight furrows, blink at something strange in these rust-colored knolls and cotton-covered fields. The plowman wends his way in circles and half-moons, and between plots he allows a sort of grass terrace or 'bunker' to grow. But this, a fellow traveler tells me, is a method of plowing. It is to keep the severe rains from washing the loose soil and plants away. All the land that is not perfectly flat is planted in this way. From an air-

plane, a field must look as if the plowman had been doing cubistic things with Nature.

We still roll on like Ole Man River. Some one points to a row of hazy hills over on the edge of the country. They say they are the Blue Ridge Mountains. That is the land that has given the song-writers such a wealth of information. I wonder if any of those mammy-beseeching songbirds of Tin Pan Alley have ever gone down here and looked at what they were writing about. I say nothing about those editorial writers and propagandists who seem able to peer far beyond the horizon without leaving their swivel chairs.

This land does not suggest songs to me, least of all jazz. The rust-colored land has a wistful beauty, this stretch of never-ending, mellow and pastel-hued country. Lest I grow sentimental over the derelict appearance of the land, companions of the smoking compartment tell me that the country around a railroad is never any good anyway. However, I hold to the opinion that it has an eerie beauty, which we do not see in the North.

I expected to get off the train and land in a dimly lit, tiny mill village. It would be somewhat grimy and there would be a rushing river somewhere, a great stone mill with a bell in the cupola on top of it, and maybe a store or two. But preconceived travel pictures always dissolve like soap bubbles. West Point didn't look like that. The town is in Georgia, home of peaches and yams, and I

will add, icicles! But the mills, of which I was to see so much in my visit, are all in Alabama. The bubble of the grim and gray mill village was cracked, instantly. I was rushed from the place where I lodged to a movie theater. Aladdin rubbed his lamp!

The very first picture I got of a Southern mill village by night was that of a highly up-to-date theater, with highly up-to-date talkies. It was very surprising, because Roxy had seemed so far away and modern drama so far out of the picture. What a smash for the bubble! Instead of a mill village sleeping under its gas lamps for the factory-roaring to-morrow, I got Clara Bow and her curves and kisses, and Harry Langdon and his comics. I was taken all over the theater, upstairs and down. It was all very modern and fine. The brick and stone building was as clean as a whistle. It cost twenty cents to sit anywhere. To see a silent picture, admission is ten cents.

The theater was fairly crowded. The only thing I noticed in any way different from an audience at home was the quiet. There was little applause or laughing. In fact, I didn't know an audience in this town could make a noise, until I saw people some time later at a basketball game. We went out. The night was anything but balmy. Oh, magnolias, sweet-smelling cape jasmines, the Flowery South of fiction, where are you now? My new friends laughed at me, with my coat collar turned up and my teeth chattering.

'Well, ever seen anything warmer than the Sunny South?'

'Yes,' I said, 'a good old east wind blowing up Boston Harbor. *Brrrrrr*.'

To-morrow I would see the mills. Then the workers. I hate that phrase 'the workers.' Why classify any people because they swap some of their time for money? As well speak of the stenography-hands, or the writing-toilers. I prefer to think of the West Point people as human individuals I met in the mills, and at their homes. But on the next day, I did not meet them at all. I met their children instead.

CHAPTER II

CHILDREN OF THE SOUTH

NEXT morning I had no plan of attack. Looking at the thriving community, all around me, it seemed that I could make a stab at any place, and information would pour out like sap from a sugar maple. Five towns, five big mills, quantities of homes, schools, and gardens, and people by the thousand. Still, it was necessary to find a guide; I looked for a man who knew the whole Chattahoochee Valley as well as I knew my home district up North.

My lucky star led me immediately to a gentleman named Ellison R. Cook. At least, that's the name his parents gave him; but nobody calls him by it. They call him 'Dad' Cook; and I called him Dad before I had been with him an hour.

Southern people are like that. They make friends very quickly, or else not at all. You don't stand around and 'mister' a man for years, as I am afraid we do in the North. You either decide that you don't like him and go your way, or else he gives you a hearty slap on the back and you are Dad and Harry for the rest of your lives.

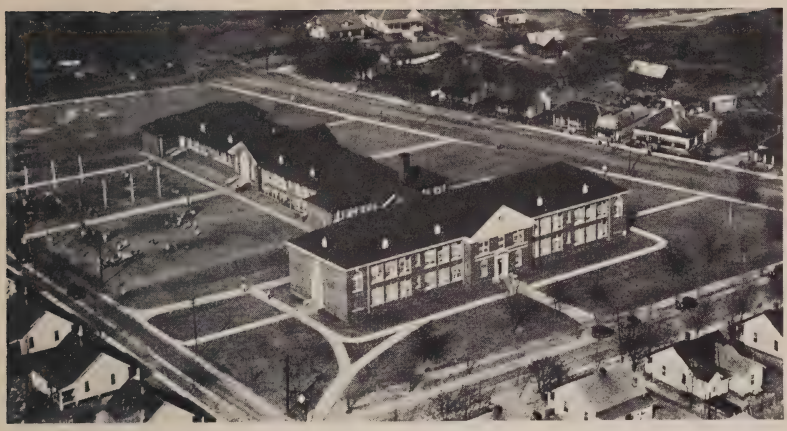
That is what we need, in Massachusetts, more than all the Chambers of Commerce and Manufacturers' Associations and Labor Unions and other formal industrial as-

sociations. We need a bit of the Southern warmth. I got all through thinking the South was cold, before Dad Cook had beamed on me long. I knew where the warmth comes from; it doesn't come from the sun, most of it comes from the fine, hospitable, friendly hearts of the folks.

'Start with the children,' advised Dad Cook. 'Let's go and take a look at the schools.'

We took an auto and drove to the nearest school, going up the Jefferson Davis Highway. After two blocks down the main street of West Point, Georgia, we bounced over a railroad track and we were in Alabama. The Lanett Mill loomed up a quarter of a mile ahead. It is the first mill in the group. The schoolhouse was the first one I had been in since I left school, twenty-odd years ago. It was also much better-looking than the school I attended — newer, fresher, cleaner. It wasn't just a big square barn, with dark interior rooms. It was a long building, laid out in the pattern of an airplane — wings, long body, and tail. There were lots of playgrounds around it and at the back was a football gridiron. The grass looked strange. It is not grass as we know it in the North, because our brand will not grow in the red soil and summer heat. It is Bermuda grass mixed with Italian rye. Either you grow that or else you don't have lawn. Just flowers.

I felt like a boy again as I shook hands with the principal, Professor Lunceford. He had a real schoolmaster look, kindly and intelligent both. It wouldn't be



THE LANETT SCHOOL

CALISTHENICS, LANETT SCHOOL

RIVER VIEW KINDERGARTEN

SCHOOL AT RIVER VIEW

a bad plan to tear down a lot of statues of generals, politicians, and authors, and put up a few statues to schoolmasters and schoolmarms. They are the real builders of progress. My new friend began opening doors and we would pop in and stand staring at the classes. And, of course, the classes stared back.

They were just the regular run of children, such as you meet anywhere; as the embarrassment of being looked at by so many bright eyes wore off, I tried to imagine that these were different from the Yankee boys and girls I used to meet at school, but they were not. Just children! Blank plates on which Professor Lunceford and his able assistant are going to etch the sort of information and facts that are absolutely indispensable in tackling the world. But not quite blank plates either. There is heredity etching something on them; and home life, and the movies, and the radio, and the Southern landscape, and the mills.

Many of these children will grow up and work in the mills. Others will go on to textile schools and other institutions of higher or technical learning. Then they will come back and enter the mills half way or away up. And some will become teachers and masters and salesmen and adventurers. It is all a question of what gets on the blank plate.

Into the rooms and out we went. I met a third grade. Their teacher asked them to sing a couple of songs for the

men who had come to see them. They grinned and sang. Some of the boys wear overalls. A few tiny ones looked cute in sailor suits. I noted a couple of barefoot boys.

In the corner of an anteroom, I see nine empty half-pint milk bottles. It seems that every child who is under weight goes on a milk ration until his weight is up to normal. I look over the white chart for a whole room of children. Almost every one of them has gained from one to two pounds since last September, about three months. If a child doesn't respond to the milk, they look further for some trouble that may be keeping his weight below normal. Doctor Emerson in Boston is probably the man who first startled the world with the danger of having children undernourished. Remember the long series of articles in the 'Woman's Home Companion' and in other magazines? I do. I don't know why he came into my mind down here in Alabama, but he did. Perhaps they learned things from him or some other men who have seen his work and helped to carry it on. He used to carry photographs in his pocket, showing how a poor, skinny, low-spirited little boy or girl can be built up in a few months into a happy and normal physical specimen.

There was a dental outfit in one room of that school; no little pupil is going to suffer, physically or mentally, from abscesses and other poisons which a dentist can so quickly cure.

There was a very busy Art Room. Students were work-

ing in oils and water colors, and some were painting china. They have their own kiln where the china can be fired. We went downstairs and I got my first disappointment. The manual-training room contained a couple of work benches pushed up against the wall and two or three boys were passing a football around. The principal explained that this is a 'weak department.' I couldn't understand it; I am one of those Yankees with tinkering blood. Yes, I am for football too. But why shouldn't that workroom be the glamorous, fascinating, boy-thronged workshop that it would be anywhere in New England? Our boys love to hammer things, and whittle and build. They grow up and keep tinkering. Do you know, I don't recall having seen any man tinkering around his house in any of the Southern mill villages during my whole stay?

One thing was notable about this school. There was plenty of room everywhere and good air and light. The curse of the Boston suburbs, the portable schoolhouse heated by a stove and ill-ventilated, is unknown at West Point and Lanett. At the end of every hour the pupils march outside. For ten minutes they can romp and holler. Safety valves are opened and excess energy is allowed to evaporate a bit. I snapped a few pictures, and I thought of wise old Nathaniel Shaler, Harvard's star professor of geology and of almost everything else in life, who said that the much better health of boys and

girls in colleges, over boys and girls everywhere else, is due to the fact that they must scurry from one lecture hall to another in the seven minutes from the end of one lecture to another. Change of scene, fresh air, that is the big trick in keeping human beings well. I was entranced by the feminine part of the senior class. Such pretty girls! Haven't we all heard that mill-workers' children are pinched and white-looking? Not here! I may add that in all my travels up and down this valley, inside the mills and out, I did not see any pinched and white-looking folks. Here and there I did see some who were underweight and a little drawn-looking, but such people were much less frequent than they are where I live.

The school term here is nine months. Until a very few years ago the school term in the surrounding country was only ninety days! Even in the outlying districts they are now doing much better, and Alabama is stepping along with good hearty strides in the matter of educating her girls and boys.

All of the expense in erecting these fine school buildings in the five mill towns was borne by the West Point Manufacturing Company, which also contributes heavily to the running expenses. Pupils get all their books free up to the senior year, when they pay half the cost. The first school session closes at eleven o'clock instead of noon, and for a peculiar reason. I went down to the Lanett Mill to see why. And while we are waiting and waiting

we might as well look the mill over and see what is wrong with it, if anything.

The mill is long and runs up the highway for some distance. It is built of red brick and stands back perhaps fifty feet from the road. Shrubs, green even now in November, are massed around at points around walks and gates. In summer, Dad Cook tells me, the long fence in front is an unbroken stretch of pink and white roses. Across from the mill are two parks; they are very pretty, planted with all sorts of trees, especially the handsome magnolia. This is an attractive spot in which to wait and the midday air is quite balmy. Small groups of men are lolling about, smoking and chatting. These are doffers, and others who can leave their machines for certain periods through the day. Lady Nicotine is not tolerated inside, unless you chew her.

Now comes the reason for the early school closing. Lunch-basket toters! Children are bringing hot lunches to their fathers in the mills, or in some cases to both parents, if both happen to work. They are not all children. Some are colored women, servants or cooks in the households. I saw many such. Of course, the mill people who live close by go home to eat, but all the houses are not so near. The lunches look strange to me. Not the food — it is just what I would expect to see in the North, except they are using more cornmeal. But these aren't our disguised lunch kits which strive to look like a camera

or a brief-case. They are good big baskets, as comfortable and sensible as they can be. It is twelve o'clock, and the whole front of the mill is just cluttered with the lunch toters. Colored mammies (Al Jolson would burst to pieces trying to center his vocal efforts on so many of them) are all over the place, and so are children. The big meal in the South is at noon, and that is what accounts for the size of these lunch baskets. I see one big boy carrying four. The whistle blows. Out come the hungry people for their lunches and the lunch toters wander back home.

I saw a lot of flappers coming out, and was interested to see that they were all wearing silk stockings. I am for that. What male is not? Some of the girls wear sweaters and some coats. They are all very nicely dressed and with their silk-stockinged legs and neat pumps, they look very attractive. I find out later that they park their pumps in the dressing-rooms and inside wear slippers while at work.

This is my first look at the folks who actually run the machines. I have read that these people are pure Anglo-Saxons, whatever that may be. Perhaps a better term would be fine old-fashioned American stock — like Henry Clay, John C. Calhoun, and Robert E. Lee. As far as I can see, these girls and men look a lot like my family, and my friends. They don't talk as we do, but speak with a pleasant soft accent. This has been called the Southern

drawl, but it doesn't sound like a drawl to me. They may not shoot their words as fast as one hears them around a Wall Street ticker, but their speech is by no means more drawly than that of a countryman from my own hills. They drop their final 'g's,' thank Heaven. Final 'g's' are the hard boiled shirts of conversation and destroy really intimate confab. But if they dispense with the final 'g,' they certainly go in strong for 'sir.'

People 'yes-sirred' me so much, I began to feel like a tottering old patriarch. Why all this deference, I thought? Then I was told that all these well-behaved children are taught to say 'yes sir' and 'no sir' and it becomes a custom. But it is terrible to have a really pretty girl say 'yes sir' to you and I'll never learn to like it. There are no 'foreign' faces to be seen. The Italian olive complexion, the Scandinavian face, the French-Canadian type of man — none of these did I find. One right after another, these Southerners passed by, and from their appearance they might be English and Scotch-Irish passengers on the old Mayflower. I sat and studied them going to and fro. They looked well fed and fit. I had read a number of things about 'the exploited and abused mill workers of the South,' but to the eye there appeared nothing to indicate such a condition here. If I had seen anybody who looked excessively tired, it would go down on the page right here.

There were two things I wanted to do before seeing

anything else. One was to get into a cotton field and get the atmosphere of that — see the stuff before it is picked. I noted in Alabama the plants were still green and not brown as they had been in the Carolinas. The other thing I wanted was a quick view of all these five mills in a sweep. This group of mills is composed of the Lanett, Shawmut, Langdale, Fairfax, and River View, in the order named and reading north to south. The mills start at Lanett and end at River View, a stretch of about eleven miles down the highway. All are on or near the Chattahoochee River. Chattahoochee is Indian for 'mud' and the Indian who named it was a great describer. But after you got used to its brownish color, you began to see its great beauty. The river doesn't exist that hasn't some beauty, or that doesn't bring charm into the country through which it crawls.

I suppose every psychologist would tell us that working in a 'pretty' mill in 'pretty' surroundings will make us happier (whether we know it or not), than working in a hideous mill in hideous surroundings. These five Alabama mills are all good-looking; and the country around them is real country, not citified. It is really lovely, all up and down the line. I have seen the mills of Fall River, Pawtucket, Lowell, Lawrence, Nashua, Manchester, and dozens of small ones throughout New England; but I have never seen mills more beautifully located than these. It is just country, such as we saw from the car windows,

with the mills set down in it. And that is the way it should be. There were no towns where the mills came.

Driving up and down the highway, we see between the mill towns miles of cotton fields and their buildings. The spic-and-span farmhouse and equally trig barn are not here; at least not as we know them in the North. I didn't see a red-painted barn with white trimmings, which is our idea of the apex in barns. Nowhere would I find any sign of a 'barn-proud' farmer.

I stopped the auto, a good strong Chevvy. Nothing would do but the greenhorn had to get out and pick a few cotton bolls. Dad Cook and the others must have thought it little better than childish to want such a common thing, but they refrained from saying so. (I'd love to take them out pulling lobster pots and see their eyes stick out.)

But pick cotton I did. It was all a part of the picture to me. I was awfully surprised to know that my nice white shirt could have grown in that red clay dirt. But it did. And so did your sheets and towels, and the sails on your boat, and your wife's pretty beach pajamas and the chintz at your windows, and — well, you don't get away from cotton one minute, day or night, and it all comes from that bright red soil.

A farmer came out to talk to us and maybe see what kind of a lunatic was picking bolls, not blossoms, off his plants. From his lips, I learned a lot about the vicissitudes of sticking little cotton seeds in the ground and the final

result in five-hundred-pound bales. It is not all skittles and beer. Recently, it has been all boll weevils and unkind weather.

The thing used to be simple. You sowed cotton in rows, chopped it out later, bestowed reasonable attention on it for ninety days from planting, and then you sat down until it was ready for the pickers. The pests of Nature hadn't come. But during the past seven years (in this section), Mr. Boll Weevil has added his unpleasant note and just about turned things upside down. He can and will put a whole crop to the bad in almost the twinkling of an eye. There seems to be no real sure-fire antidote for him. He doesn't always come, but like the stork, nobody quite knows when he will show up. About the sweetest anthem the cotton farmers could hear over their radios would be the swan song of Mr. Boll Weevil. At the present he is singing in good strong tones, 'I'm King for a Day' and fishing for an encore. Yet I heard it said that the coming of the boll weevil (from Mexico) has been a blessing in a way. Without him there would have been a staggering overproduction of cotton and a tumbling market. That is all rather confusing, one of those economic puzzles that sounds well but doesn't make consumers rich, or farmers either. As for the farmer who is hoping for two bales to an acre and gets only one half a bale, there is only one answer. He is operating at a loss and chaos looms up at the end of the season. And here is

one reason why so many of the farming class have let go of the plow handles and rushed to the loom and spindles. Let George do it! There are better things at the end of the rusty, muddy road in the country. The cotton mills. There is, he feels, a job there, a house better than he has ever lived in, with rent next to nothing, electric lights, schools, movies, athletic buildings, and, last but not least, churches. He doesn't hesitate long. Into a wagon go family, furniture, dog, and what have you — and away he goes to try his luck in the mill.

You cannot roam around a cotton field long without feeling the romance of it. Of all things grown from the soil, here is the most marvelous. This fluffy white fruit looks as if it grew naturally, like dandelion seeds. But you can't take a taxi, or your own car, without using it between you and the street, and you can't blow your nose, or put a decent modern polish on your car without consciously or unconsciously saying 'I thank you' to some man who fought boll weevils for your comfort and ease.

And down here, whether you grow it or spin it, or sell it, cotton is part of you. As the salt spindrift is part of the sailorman, and the steam and smoke of a locomotive is part of the railroad man — so is this bit of white fluff part of every man who works with it here on the Chattahoochee.

Down in this valley, you see cotton, breathe cotton, think cotton, feel cotton — there is no getting away from it.

CHAPTER III

THREE OLD MEN WHO LIKED IT

FROM children to charter members seems a big jump, but that was the way I began this investigation. Schools for a start, and the following day I met three old gentlemen who had been with the Lanett Mill since it rolled out its first yard of duck. The first yard never went any place. It's still there in the mill office. It's like a first impression of an etching — in a frame.

The first old gentleman came out of his house and shook hands with me. He is pensioned by the company. Eighty-six years old, and still pretty straight, and feeling more like work than staying around home. The grip of his hand was firm and powerful. I didn't know that fist had gripped a musket in the Siege of Vicksburg, or we would have talked about something else than the mill.

We stood on the fringe of what might have been a lawn, if they had lawns. Only flowers. And the zinnias and asters were making their final protest against calling it a year. It was cold.

'So you still want to work in the mill?' I asked him.

Maybe it was just the momentum of a long life spent doing one thing. Or the desire to be in the smell and flavor of accustomed things, as an old actor starves for grease paint and mouldy canvas. Or just an indomitable spirit crying for never-ending activity.

THE HANDS THAT GRIPPED THE MUSKET AT VICKSBURG

AN ABANDONED FARM

APARTMENT HOUSES

RECENT VILLAGE DEVELOPMENT

'Yes. They won't let me come back. Afraid I'll get hurt maybe. But I'd be happier back in the mill. I feel fine.'

'You were born here? Or did you come from the hills?'

At last, I thought, here was one of the workers who had 'come from the hills.'

'I was born over yonder, in the country, about thirty miles from here. And I've been in the mills for over thirty years.'

'That's a long time.'

'Yes, sir. I reckon it is. But I'd like to be back. The mills are all right. They treat you fine. They're good people.'

We moved on to see another man. Here was a good chance to see the mill town as a town; no mill, just the houses. They all looked alike. Painted a light gray or white. They blow the paint on with a spray, about a hundred and fifty houses every year. As there are something like seven hundred houses in this town, that means a house gets a coat of paint once in four years. I think they'd look better painted with a brush. And last longer.

The roads through the village are high crowned and there are deep gutters plowed on the sides. The houses are set back from the walks about fifteen to twenty feet. And there is good air space all around and between the houses. They are not crowded.

Everybody seemed to have a backyard, and a produc-

tive one. Vegetables were still growing, a few kinds. There was a kind called collards. Everybody laughed at me when I said I'd never heard of it. It was a kind of cabbage. With side meat, boiled, it is very good.

We wandered around a few bends and came to a low-built cottage with a lot of vines and growing things all around. This was not a mill-owned house. The man owned it himself.

We knocked on the door and a hearty voice called to come in. He was as hearty as his voice. And he laughed much and often, with great relish. His legs had gone back on him, but he could still laugh in a wholesale manner.

There was a small stove in the front room and they burned soft coal in it. This Alabama coal does a fine job and doesn't 'clinker.' Everybody uses it. You poke it and then sit back and stare into it and think, just as everybody does at a fireplace.

This man's name was Bob Adams and he was a cosmopolite. He'd been everywhere, as a sailor.

'Ha! Ha! I know your Boston. The streets are the crookedest anywhere and the sidewalks are the narrowest. I've been there a lot. What's the name of that Square where that big market is? Adams Square? Oh, yes, I've been there lots of times. I like Boston.'

He was pretty comfortable. He retired after more than thirty years' service in the mill and is pensioned. His

hobby was radios — plural. He must have had a dozen different kinds of radio sets, and as many loud speakers. He talked of this and that, as a man would who knew the Seven Seas. And the mill.

'The mill?' he said. 'A fine mill to work in. Fine. Best people in the world. I'd be working in there to-day, only for my legs.'

We went out after we got warm, and went back down to the middle of the village to see another man who had been retired after as long a service as the other two. He was short and stocky and he looked rather searchingly at me with his black eyes. He dropped the 'y' from the word 'yes,' a habit that I noticed a few times later in the South. We sat down and talked.

''Es, sir. I've worked a long time in the mill. I've raised ten children. Four of them went to college and graduated.'

I did not ask how this had been done. It seemed a pretty big job for a man who had been an operative in the mill. Probably it's an epic in purpose and self-sacrifice. It ought to be written.

We sat and talked quite a while in the front room. There was an alcove off the front hall and in it was a piano. Even though we talked there was an element of embarrassment present. The man's wife and daughter came in and I guess they all wondered what I really wanted and who I was. This business of poking your

nose into places and into people's business was proving a bit of a strain. But these Southerners have splendid manners — better than we have in the North.

A lot has been written about these houses of the mill workers. They are said to be bad, or good, or indifferent. Reports tell you nothing at all. What you have read are observers' opinions.

I will simply describe a house, a representative house, in terms of architecture and carpentry. They are a good deal alike. There are three-room, four-room, and five-room houses. They are built so that an extra room can be added at any time.

Here's a house.

Foundation, several brick posts. The sills are placed on these posts. Style, bungalow or cottage. Exterior finish, clapboards. Windows, all screened. Chimney, brick. The general plan of the three-room house is L-shaped. They are painted white or light gray. There is a piazza, big enough for the whole number of occupants and more.

The houses usually have two front doors, for some reason which I never did find out. You knock at one of them and the other may pop open and you feel as if you may be in the right church but in the wrong pew.

I have seen thousands of these houses, at Opelika and LaGrange, Georgia, and Gastonia, North Carolina, as well as those of the five villages under investigation. They are certainly of the same species — and the origin of the

species I know not. It would seem as if they might vary them a little. There *are* other roofs — hip, gambrel, gable, pitch, and M-roofs, you know.

Inside, hardwood floors of narrow boards, blind-nailed. Some ceilings are plastered, some are of wall-board. The walls are of wall-board with wood trim on the joints and some walls are plastered. There are mantels and small fireplaces in one or two rooms. The interior color is usually light gray. They are all well lighted by plenty of windows. Artificial illumination, electricity.

The kitchen is called the stove-room. The tenant can put in a coal or wood range, or a kerosene stove. In the stove-room is a sink with running water. And off the stove-room is a flush toilet.

There are very few bathrooms in these workers' homes. I did see one or two. One takes a bath in the stove-room per the old-fashioned washtub.

There is no waste room. Generally you will find a bed in the front room. Not all the front rooms I went in had beds in them, but a good many did.

There is your mill-worker's home as I saw it. They are livable and can be made homey and attractive, in spite of what anybody says or has said. It has been my lot in the past to go in all sorts of homes. Some that cost hundreds of thousands of dollars. And at the other end of the rainbow, I've been in some of the filthiest, most disreputable hovels imaginable. So I think I know homes.

These mill-workers' houses are put up wholesale. They are not hovels or shacks. They are, from what I saw of the surrounding country, quite an improvement over the farmhouses from which many of the workers came. And I have been in some where the housewife had a knack for interior decoration and in such instances they were certainly attractive and comfortable.

The thermometer went down to 15° while I was going about in these homes but I saw no hardship from the cold. There are not many such days in the Alabama calendar.

The rental of such houses, throughout all these five villages, is twenty-five cents per room per week, with free light and water. Therefore, the rent of a four-room house, including electricity and water, is four dollars per month. There are no hobbles on the electric juice. You can run a flatiron, a hot plate, or a fan and there's no bill for it at the end of the month.

I heard a story of one young chap who happened to step into the job of owning and running a mill and its village. He had ideas. One of them was the building of bigger and better homes for his workers. So he went in for designs and betterments and also quartered-oak finish. And one day a few months after the tenants had gone into them, he made an inspection. All his lovely quartered-oak was now hand-carved and well initialed. Ruined! He didn't build any more homes like that.

In my travels I saw examples of houses abused and houses improved. Evidences of prideful tenancy and evidences of don't-give-a-darn. Any landlord in this wide and expensive land knows about that story. It's just one of those things — and sometimes just too bad!

CHAPTER IV

IN THE MILL

I THINK it is about time we saw Jack and Jill at their stunts in the mills. I can't tell you how it feels to stand up in front of a busy, pounding loom all day long, but I can tell you how Jill looks after she has been at it. It was what you might call a zero hour, four o'clock of a Friday, at the tag end of a day and a week.

Jill, I may tell you, goes into her place of business at six flat in the dewy morn, whether the birds are singing in the magnolia trees or the darkened ice splotches on the ground are reflecting the golden light of the waning moon.

She quits at 5 P.M. There is an hour for lunch. On Saturday she leaves at eleven in the morning. A fifty-five hour week when the mill is running on full time. In one other State in the South (I think it is North Carolina) it is a sixty-hour week.

I went into the Lanett Mill, and the superintendent, Mr. Jennings, said we would go through from top to bottom. We left the comparative quiet of the offices and walked across a courtyard and plunged into the picker room.

This was on the ground floor and there were groups of negroes around, and bales of cotton standing on end. Machines were taking the cotton in the form in which it

comes from the gin and gathering it into their various maws to whack it about and clean it. It was some noisy! You could talk with your mouth to an ear and get about as much as you could over a 1920 model radio.

The machines seemed to be bearing the major part of the battle, and the workers just moving about like referees. Nobody rushed around. There was a group of three Negro women huddled over in one corner.

Technicalities were poured into my ear, and, as Sherlock Holmes remarked, so did I: 'Now that I know it, I shall do my best to forget it.'

We went out of that room into another. I don't remember the name of it. I have a vague mental panorama of rattling machines in long, black rows and whirling belts. And rough cotton being gradually cleaned and refined and finally worked into a sort of fairy-like webby stream of next to nothing at all. It poured out of some rollers and it was as ephemeral-looking as floating-island pudding. It was fascinating to grab some away from its course and feel this next-to-nothing in your fingers. The stuff is more fragile than anything imaginable, like flat sheets of dead dandelion blossoms, the kind you used to blow. You could look at it and wonder how it can ever become strong enough to pull the biggest ship afloat, in the form of a bulging sail. And stronger than that! You could blow it away now, and later it could blow *you* away!

After this it went through another textile metamor-

phosis and began to be tubular in shape, like endless white snakes coiling into tall, foot-wide cylinders. And after that into strands and strings and finally threads. There were a lot of things done to it. The bolls of the fields had come a long way.

I looked at every worker I passed by. Some of them looked at me. I saw Jill doing every sort of job in front of the big machines. It did not seem as if she was toiling very strenuously. It was more like just being there and watching for something to break. A flock of black, throbbing machines. There were no fast movements. You stood by and watched for the breaks. You could wear soft slippers. But you couldn't smoke. And sometimes you could sit down for a spell, and talk.

I studied, on the wing, all the Jills in sight. Pleasant work! Mr. Ziegfeld would have stopped once or twice and raised an appraising eyebrow, I am sure. I saw a beautiful blonde running some kind of a ten-foot-long black monster and it seemed to be eating out of her hand. So would I, gladly.

They looked all right. I have seen stenographers and bundle girls more drooping and weary at a similar hour. The tempo was slow, methodical. They saved steps. Most cotton-mill machines are as docile as family horses. You can sit down and let them graze and you don't have to do anything about them until they break a thread. The awfulest bugbear in a cotton mill is broken threads.

Broken threads which were once blossoms. Just one darned broken thread after another.

Is there a cotton-mill face? There is a taxi-driver's face. And butchers have a look. And sailormen have something about them, especially the eyes, that no others have. And doctors smell of ether and glare at you through overpolished glasses.

I did notice once in a while a whitish, pinched face and thought I was on the trail of something. But a fat, ruddy one right afterwards knocked the fancied clue silly. But there were a few of these pallid-looking ones. Not many. Some men and some women. Some seemed to have round shoulders.

I had to come to the conclusion, after going through, there is no type. They looked like anybody else. Fat ones and thin ones and medium ones. There is no visible tag. Mill work doesn't 'do' anything to you. It isn't such hard work; mostly tedious.

We went into a big room called a 'Dope Stand.' The name was misleading. It should have been called a filling station. They sold tonics, hot dog, and hamburger sandwiches, and this and that. There were tons of candy and peanuts and all sorts of things for a between-meals snack. It was very well patronized. The workers came in in twos and threes, and bought things, and lolled about and ate them.

It was O.K. if you didn't have any cash. You bought

twenty checks worth a nickel apiece and notice of the transaction was sent down to the bookkeeper's office and the money taken out of your pay. Things were cheap and good. I tried a ginger ale and we stood about and looked at the pleasant interlude of stoking the inner furnaces while the clattering machines minded their *p*'s and *q*'s outside.

We went on and on, from one big, long room into another. I walked through narrow aisles of jumpy machines expecting to get nipped by them in some portion of my anatomy but nothing happened. The machines are pretty well protected. People do get nipped now and then. There is an emergency room for nips and bites. I was cordially invited to sit around in one of a morning, and see the nurse repair damages to epidermis and what not, but I just as cordially declined.

'Do come in some morning and see it,' she said. 'We aim to please.' She came from my vicinity up North, and we both spoke through our noses. Once a Yank, always a Yank. Did you ever hear Calvin Coolidge over the radio?

'No thanks,' said I. 'Anything about gauze bandages and cuts I'll take your word for. Such things give me the shivers. I am always a patient and never could achieve the aloofness of an audience.'

Some of the work was getting heavier. The wee modest, once crimson-tipped flower of the South was now wound around great spools or cylinders about six feet

long, and as big around as a fat baby hippopotamus. The cotton was getting ready to go on a loom. But first it had to get a bath or sizing to make the threads properly tough and taut.

In some of these rooms for spinning and carding we met the humidifiers. Or rather they met us. A humidifier doesn't wait for an introduction; it greets you heartily and all over. They are hung up above and are really nothing but big atomizers spraying moisture. When you go into this wettish atmosphere it feels queer, something like a mild Russian room in a Turkish Bath. In a few minutes you don't notice it so much, and finally hardly at all.

This dampness is necessary. Cotton in its baby stages up to adult cloth-hood has to be kept moist or it will break. There's always that break, break, break, to think about. If it's too dry, it just snaps off too easily.

The big spools (that isn't what they call them) are run through the sizing and it has a pastey smell. Then later it gets dry enough to go on the looms. There are a lot of different steps along here, done mostly by men now.

We went into the weave-room or shed. Only half of it was running as it was towards the end of the week. Here was where the thread became duck. Miles and miles of duck.

The loom is the star of the piece, the prima donna, the heart of the thing. Before, everything is just material,

stuff. And afterwards it's just finishing. It is a wonderful thing, a loom. Back and forth with incredible speed goes the shuttle, and when one gets empty, a freshly loaded one drops into place without stopping anything. Not a beat lost. And when it breaks a thread, it doesn't stop and scratch its head and wonder about it; it just stops short and waits. A very smart machine.

There were men weavers and women weavers. In fact, one of the best weavers was a woman and she could manage an unbelievable number of looms. One weaver can look after several, and is valuable according to his capacity in this respect.

After the weaving we went out to the end of the building to see the cloth room. Here scores of Jills were examining the run of cloth to look for imperfections. They were sitting down and in some instances they looked like artists bending over a canvas. Some worked with strong blue lights overhead and others with the lights underneath the cloth. It was a pleasant room to work in.

I was asked several times during this visit, generally with a grin, if I'd seen any children. Coming from the North, evidently they thought I'd heard about children working in the mills.

I did not see any children in any of the mills. They may have been there once upon a time. I have heard they were. But I'm telling about what I saw. There were no children.

They can work half-time from the age of fourteen until sixteen. The rest of the time they have to attend school. There are not many of these half-timers and it is only permitted when there is a widowed mother, or in some such emergency.

Before people can work in the mills in Alabama full time they have to be sixteen years old. Inspectors come around often and unannounced. They are women and take their jobs seriously. If the mill doesn't have a birth certificate handy of any young person who might look under the age limit, the superintendent has a bad time. But it just isn't done any more.

If we were dealing with the past, there would, I think, be a different story to tell. At present it is not a juvenile story in any way. The workers in these mills are adults. The streets are free and anybody can stand there and see the workers come out and look them over. He will not see any children.

Is the mill a pleasant place to work in? Does one suffer? Is it uncomfortable?

There is a good deal of noise in some rooms and some vibration. You get used to that, I imagine, if you can develop a mental 'cushion' against it. There are no bad smells — unless the bleachery and dye works can be considered smelly. But up to that part of the business there are no gases or odors. There is nothing to hurt your skin like acids or anything that can be breathed that would

affect the lungs. The lint and dust are taken care of by suction machines.

The work in general looks more tedious than strenuous, more calling for care than for mental effort, more draining on stamina than strength.

I have tried to draw a picture of what the worker looks like during his day. There are so many jobs that consist solely of watching these interminable miles of thread. These could not possibly come under the heading of the hardest jobs in the world. Tracing and tieing broken threads. Scores of women wear a small machine on their left hands which ties a weaver's knot as quickly as you can wink your eye.

I did not see any woman who had any job that called for lifting or straining at anything. The women are mostly nurses to broken threads. And healthy threads, too. Some of the men have jobs that call for strength, and others for a certain dexterity of hand, as the doffers.

These doffers change loaded spools for empty ones so fast that the human eye can scarcely see their fingers fly.

Considering the amount of loose cotton and lint that is freed in the many processes, the mill was surprisingly clean. The floors were kept clean everywhere.

Perhaps the reader may think the writer knows not whereof he speaks when he describes labor. But I have the background and it isn't forgotten. I have worked in a sawmill, hours seven to six, and six days a week. I have

worked in a carriage paint shop with the same hours. And a lampshade factory, same hours.

Hence, when I observe a human being who earns his money by manual toil, I know something about how his back feels and his legs and if there is an ache, when; also how empty and hungry and tired he can be around five o'clock and how he feels about the whole darned thing.

Well, what he does in these cotton mills is plenty. It's a good day's work he puts in. I've seen him at his gadgets, helms, and throttles in this business of making cotton cloth out of cotton fruit, and the curfew must find him feeling he doesn't owe anybody any more work.

But I'd rather do many things in a cotton mill than be on the receiving end of a double-bladed circular saw, throwing slivery residue in the alley with the left hand and filing away a twenty-foot long plank with the right all at the same time all day long — which task I know all about. Work in the cotton mill is work, yes. But not killing. Mostly monotonous. Looking for threads, tieing threads, starting up machines that have hesitated. Watching and feeding countless black, whirring machines.

I once observed a couple of Irishmen going home from work. One had his shovel with him, the shovel he dug in the street with. He was polishing the blade of it with his sleeve, lovingly. The other man spoke of a mutual friend.

'Pat is a good shoveler,' he said.

'Yis. So he is.'

'But *only* a good shoveler. He is not a fancy shoveler, like me.'

I am wondering if there is any of that feeling in the man of the mill. Does he love his loom, his machine, or what not? Maybe he does. If he does, that's the leaven for monotony, tedium. I wish I had heard somebody talking to his loom or his spindles or carder. Any workman will know what I mean.

Because if you don't love your tools, work is drudgery. If you do, work is the finest thing in the world.

CHAPTER V

NOT 'HELP' BUT PARTNERS

This will be a chapter on a subject vital to every man and woman in the world, what's coming in, and what's going out.

We must start by getting rid of the word 'paternalism.' You can't go to any good father these days, and say, 'How's your paternalism?' The word has come to mean a sort of a sentimental and hypocritical poking into other people's affairs, as if the father of a son walked around everywhere with his hand on the boy's head, giving forth a constant blast of moral advice. That's not the way good fathers act with their sons. What they do with their sons is well known to you — they give help when needed, they set a good example, they take the boy with them hunting, sailing, or golfing, they demand good work in school, and decent manners at home. But they don't nag, and they don't use an extra amount of soft soap to get results.

The Lanier family built and manage these mills in West Point and Lanett. They have been cotton millers for fifty years and more. The Lanier family also produced Sidney Lanier, the leading poet of the South; and it has produced such men as Mr. Charles Lanier, of New York, who was for many years the publisher of such good maga-

zines as the 'Review of Reviews.' So I know I am right in saying that the Lanier family are people of a great deal of culture, civic spirit, and imagination. In other words, they are people who regard their workers more as partners than as hired help.

And right here let me say something I've noticed all my life. Unless a man can do all his own work, he *always* has to take partners. As soon as he hires an office boy, he has gone into partnership with that boy. He and the boy make their livings together. The customers pay both of them. I am about the only man I know who is not a partner of any one — I write my stories on my own typewriter, put them into envelopes, and take them to the postoffice myself. But a man can't run any sort of large office in that way, or any sort of shop or mill. He must have help. And these helpers are supported by the income of his business just as much as he is. He divides the income with them. You can call it wages, or you can call it commissions, or you can call it partnership division — *it's the same thing, and the customers pay it.*

Of course I know (and who does not?) that a great many stupid, short-sighted employers have in the past divided too little of the company's income with the people who work with them in the office or factory. Up to fifty years ago, very few people of the finest sort went into business at all. Therefore, the very best men we had in this country, up to the war in 1861, were either farmers

and planters, or else they went into the 'learned professions.' They were ministers, lawyers, doctors, army or navy officers, but they were not business men.

This left the early business field in America wide open to second-grade men — stupid fellows, too greedy and too badly educated to see all business as a partnership. These morons, as you can quite correctly call them, victimized the men and women who toiled for them. But no men and women (least of all good Americans of English, Scotch-Irish, or Celtic stock) will stand being victimized forever. Sixty and seventy years ago, the workers started to organize into unions to demand fair wages, fair working conditions, and fair chances of promotion. Soon these unions, or most of them, got into control of greedy professional agitators — second-grade men, too. Then began the long series of strikes and lockouts, which made money for nobody, neither the managers of a business, nor the workers, nor the customers, who bought the products of the business.

America is growing up now. Just as the Lanier family went into business fifty years ago, so have other folks of the highest type gone into business. Up in Boston we have the famous Cabot family (descendants, I believe, of John and Sebastian Cabot who discovered the mainland of America). This family now owns a great chemical plant near Boston, making dozens of different house-building specialties. And the family not only owns the

plant, but runs it — just as the Disston family of Philadelphia makes saws, and the Du Pont family of Wilmington makes auto finishes, etc. Our young men of birth and breeding are not afraid of hard work, any more. Calvin Coolidge's son works in a railroad office. Young men of the Morgan, Rockefeller, Roosevelt, and other well-known families are hard at work nowadays in business — not loafing around, and living on inherited money, as they surely would have done a hundred years ago.

This is a bigger thing than the World War. It is the most significant thing which has happened in our lifetimes. I am glad to know that the Lanier family were pioneers in helping to bring it about. Instead of selling their inherited acres and going to some city to collect etchings and play polo, their young men, generation after generation, have stuck in the cotton business, and have made the cotton business a better thing for the workers who are in business with them.

Now what do these workers get in actual cash? And what do they have to spend for living expenses in actual cash?

I thought I would like to see some actual pay envelopes. I saw plenty. I fingered them, and saw the money inside. I got some figures from the superintendent's office in the Lanett Mill, and these will go for the other four mills, because the scale is similar in all of them. I saw the pay roll sheets. Every man and woman in the mill has a big sheet

for himself, and his pay is entered on it from week to week. This varies somewhat according to whether he works full time or not; and many jobs are figured by piece work.

On an average, the pay for unskilled labor is ten dollars per week. The pay for skilled labor is eighteen dollars per week. I saw many sheets where it was more than that, twenty and twenty-two dollars, but that's a fair average.

Here is a scale which is averaged from consulting the sheets of several kinds of jobs. Doffers, $16.00 per week. Spinners, $12.50 per week. Warper hands, $20.00 per week. Weavers, $18.50 per week. Card-room help and frame hands, $16.00 per week. Card hands, $15.00 per week.

These figures are for the privates in the big army. The corporals and top-sergeants get more. They can work up to any job and pay their ability and energy can qualify them for. The figures I have quoted are for the rank and file — the people who go in and come out day after day, year after year, with the same rating.

That is their income. Set it down on the left-hand page of your pocket account book. A dollar is a dollar. Does it buy as much along the Chattahoochee as it buys in Boston?

Let's put down some figures on the right-hand page.

First, there is rent, light, and water. Four dollars per month. These houses are not shacks. They are perfectly

livable and comfortable. The same thing, just as livable and comfortable, in the North would cost more, probably five or six times as much. Anybody who has ever seen a corporation house in some of our Northern mill cities will have little to say on this subject. Very little.

Also, if anybody will consult his electric light bill (service including use of flatiron, fan, and hot plate) he will see this costs more than the whole housing charge in Lanett, and these other towns.

Now, how about the other costs of living — eats, mostly? I went into many markets and stores. I didn't see much difference in their prices. At the moment butter was about twelve cents cheaper per pound in Lanett than in the cities up North. Milk was two cents per quart higher.

Near by are the A. & P. Stores, the Piggly Wiggly (ye gods, what a name!), and other chain provision stores. This somewhat fractures the statement oftentimes heard that mill workers *have* to trade with the mill-owned stores. The West Point Manufacturing Company does not own the A. & P. Store, or the Piggly Wiggly, or the Woolworth or Penney Stores.

It would seem that food prices are about the same as in other places, with a few things cheaper. One item that is considerably lower is fresh or native beef. There is a good saving here.

There are a few other items that can go down on the

right-hand page. It is possible to keep hens in one's own backyard and most people do. Hens do well in that climate. (I heard the top kicker of one big flock across the Chattahoochee crowing all night, and every night. Sounded like over-production.) Eggs are cheap, at any rate, whether you keep hens or not. They cost half the price charged in Boston — and they are fresher.

Families on the fringes of the villages can keep a cow. The care of a cow is no problem to these people, as most of them were raised in the country. Year-around grazing is free (the company provides this) and if a cow doesn't show a profit on this basis, then she's a bad cow. A great many families do keep a cow or two. I asked how much a cow cost. I got two answers; from $35.00 to $50.00, and another at $100.00. I have an idea that you could go out with $75.00 and bring back a cow capable of doing her life's work adequately — which is giving around two gallons of milk a day.

Of course these are only side lines — what the thrifty family might do in spare time. There are, though, many folks with no great yearning to sit athwart a wobbly three-legged stool and milk a temperamental cow, after a day in the mills. And there are others who feel a certain loathing to minister to the stupid and oft-ailing hen. But these two opportunities are wide open, nevertheless.

The backyard garden is the rule rather than the exception. Almost everybody raises vegetables. This soil, so

they say, will grow anything. I believe it. When you can see a fig tree, a pecan tree, a peach tree, and six sorts of vegetables growing together in a backyard, it looks like pretty versatile soil.

They grow a new one to me, who has thumbed and digested his vegetable seed catalogs, lo! these many Februaries and Marches. I mentioned it before. Collards. As far as I can see, a collard is a cabbage that couldn't quite make up its mind to come to a head on the way up. You pick the leaves and boil them, with side-meat.

There's a thing, side-meat. Interesting. In every Octavus Roy Cohen story I ever read in the 'Saturday Evening Post,' Florian Slappey or some other character hied himself to Bud Peglar's restaurant and filled up on side-meat. It sounded most appetizing. So I went into a butcher shop to see some. Another illusion shattered! It's nothing but what we call in New England lean salt pork. It comes in slabs and the prevailing market price for making yourself sick on it is seventeen cents a pound.

But while in this butcher shop I did stumble on something utterly, startlingly novel. I'm trying to forget it. The butcher held up a cluster of what must have been the entire power plant and pumping station of a pig. It was like a Christmas tree upside down. Heart, lungs, liver, and whatever other organs happened to be in the vicinity. It was sold as a complete unit (sentiment, no doubt, prevailed against parting organs that had been pals for life).

It would be the main ingredients for a sort of hash. Sixty-five cents took it away.

It occurred to me about that time to find out about savings accounts in the bank. I wondered if anybody could save money in this scheme of things. So I asked for this information and got it.

There are, among the employees of these five mills, 822 active savings accounts January 1, 1929. One hundred and twenty-six accounts have been closed in the past year. Bank officials are not eager to publish the private business of their depositors, so I can't quote the average size of these 822 accounts. But I looked over them. They are substantial — very.

There are as many automobiles as savings accounts. The Ford is the most popular car, with the Chevrolet runner-up. Half the houses I went into had radio sets, electric sets mostly. I noted the Bosch, Atwater Kent, Radiola, and others.

It is pretty often the case that more than one member in a family works in the mills. Husband and wife, and maybe a cousin. In this way the family exchequer is often in a pretty healthy condition. Each family has its own problem to solve about this. There is always somebody (Negro nurses are plentiful) who can take care of Junior if mother wants to add to the family income with the fruits of her own toil, as so many of our wives do, up North. My own wife had a job with the Atlantic Monthly Company.

Mr. Powel's wife runs an antique store. It's the fashion for modern women to work, not sit around home while the men folks are out working.

There is one other major item — fuel. The mule-drawn coal and wood wagon is a frequent sight around these villages. The coal is an Alabama product, bituminous. It is sold to everybody in the mills for $7.50 per ton during the winter and about a dollar less in the summer. It is good coal. It throws out a steady heat and does not 'clinker' like some brands of soft coal. This is used in the grates which are fitted into all the homes.

Wood is used a great deal. It sells for about the same price per cord. If anthracite is used, I didn't see any.

I know this chapter is accurate. I haven't gilded the lily, but neither have I pulled off any petals. There isn't anything I know about local wages or prices of things which I haven't put down. I have left out some instances of very high wages being made by extra skillful workers, because I wished to write only and all the time about the rank and file in the mills.

There are plenty of opportunities in these mills for the bright and ambitious young man to remove himself from the ranks and move upwards. It is a fact that the mill officials urge any promising young man and woman to get a higher education to get out of the ranks. If they want technical training to fit themselves for a higher job, they would have to hide under a barrel not to get it. These

mills, to my certain knowledge, have helped scores of young people to get a higher education and a technical training which will fit them for high-paid positions. I talked with the men who received this help.

Says the most famous manufacturer who ever lived: 'If you expect a man to give you his time and energies, fix his wages so that he will have no financial worries. It pays.'

CHAPTER VI

'LET'S GO PLACES!'

WHEN the worker in a mill says that, what happens? How many places of decent amusement or real interest has he to pick from? That's an important question because mills are often built in places where a cyclone has played a joke on somebody. A mill is usually built where land is cheap and water power right handy and the rest of the picture may be very bare indeed.

Jill must have places to go to or, like Jack, she'll be dull. And a dull Jill is about as useful as a safety-razor blade used seven times seven.

One can always go to the movies in any of these five towns in the Chattahoochee Valley. I attended several picture shows in the Lanett Auditorium. This is a really fine little theater, good-looking, and not a thing missing that a theater ought to have. To improve the acoustics, they have draped the walls in a heavy dark green cloth. This material (made in the Lanett Mill) absorbs the harshness of the loud speakers and prevents echoing. The talkies sound as well in this theater as they have in any theater I ever attended.

Let's see what our friends get for their money. The admission to a silent picture with news reel or comedy is ten cents. The talkies with news reel or comedy (talking) cost twenty cents.

MAGNOLIA CLUB

LANGDALE MILL

SEARS MEMORIAL ATHLETIC HALL

HIGH SCHOOL, SHAWMUT

Here is the program for the week of November 18:

Monday: 'Through Different Eyes,' a talkie, with Mary Duncan and Warner Baxter. News Reel.
Tuesday: 'The Younger Generation,' fifty per cent talkie with Jean Hersholt.
Wednesday: 'Careless Age,' with Doug Fairbanks, Jr., and Loretta Young. Harry Langdon Talkie, 'Sky Boy.'
Thursday and Friday: 'The Green Murder Case,' with William Powell, All-Talkie. All Talkie Comedy Thurs. All Talkie News on Friday.
Saturday: 'Melody Lane,' with Josephine Dunn.

These are all recent pictures. Sometimes a picture is shown in Lanett before it goes to Atlanta. I enjoyed several shows in this theater. It is always spotlessly clean, the air especially fresh and pure (it is changed every few minutes), and the seats are so arranged that you have extra leg room. I think this theater seats about twelve hundred.

All these five mill towns have their own theaters. People can visit all of them, of course, as there is a bus line that runs up and down the highway.

There is a fine tennis court at Lanett, equipped with powerful electric lights so that games can be played at night as well as in the daylight. The other towns in the group have courts, too. The backstops of these courts are painted black, so the white ball is always plainly visible.

Back of the Auditorium there is the Athletic Hall at Lanett. It is a similar building, built of brick and trimmed with white stone. One night I attended a basket-ball game — or rather a series of them.

There was a band outside on the stone steps when we

got there and a lot of people were standing around. The band was composed of workers in the Lanett Mill. They wore uniforms of dark blue and there were two girls in the organization. One of them played a saxophone. The leader gave a little toot-toot and off they started on a march. They played well. And after that we all went inside the hall and found seats.

It was a fine basket-ball hall, and too hot, as basket-ball halls always are. The audience was mostly young and made all the noise, although there were two teams getting warmed up on the floor, throwing marvelous baskets from impossible angles, as teams always do in practice. I saw a couple of small boy spectators in overalls and with bare feet. The band came in and settled itself at one side and played every now and then, but nobody seemed to pay much attention to it.

The uniforms of the basket-ball players were very colorful and no doubt expensive. The first two teams represented Lanett and Langdale High Schools.

The whistle blew. Hectic gyrations, straining, dodging, and bouncing the ball on the smooth floor. Rushing up one end of the hall and then back to the other. Yells and pounding. The shrill blast of the referee's whistle which the interested observer always construes as an insult to the enjoyment of life at the moment. Shrieks and advice from young, partisan throats. Sleek, sweating bodies out on the floor.

A Negro boy sat off by himself up in the balcony. They do not sit with the white people and everybody understands it and never thinks about it at all. Down South he sits off by himself and they like him and up North he sits with us and half the time we don't like him.

I saw two games of basket-ball and that was enough. But the audience liked it and stayed on for the tournament of the towns.

We wandered into the big kindergarten building where some sort of shindig was going on, by the sounds which came from it. It wasn't a shindig at all, but a comic opera in rehearsal. Members of the Epworth League in some of the churches were putting it on.

Groups of good-looking young people were clustered around the piano at one end of the hall, and others were trying to sit in the absurd little chairs of the kindergarteners. A group of girls were out on the floor, led by another girl, and first they kicked out with their right legs and then with their left and sang a chorus. Everybody was earnest and all pepped up.

I asked if they worked in the mill, but they did not. Some of them were children of mill workers.

A young lady held out a score book of the opera for me to follow and I held it with her, just as you would in a church singing from a hymn book. The rehearsal went on the way they always do — 'Stop — go, Stop — go. Now do it *this* way. Just you watch me. See? Go —

stop.' Until everybody is half dead with hope and dread and wondering if they will ever, ever see their names in dizzy bulbs on Broadway, for all the trouble. Lots of fun, doing plays.

I left that place with the idea that Jill and her boy friend have plenty to do and lots of places to go to. Personal thrills for the active, and talented, vicarious ones for those not so limber and rarin' to go.

They have a little Paradise out on the road from Lanett about two miles. It is one of those things that optimists dream about and that make strong men tremble with joy. There is nothing like it up in the land of snowballs and fishballs. It's a golf course where you can play all day for twenty-five cents! As far as I know this is the lowest green fee in the country.

I asked if any of the mill workers ever played and was told that none of them did, but they could if they wanted to. Perhaps they haven't stooped to conquer the game of pasture-shinny yet — but one of these days a doffer, or baler is going to square off at the first tee and something is going to happen.

One of the old sports has been revived in these parts — or rather, it has revived itself. Croquet! After being buried for thirty years or more as a big-time sport, it has blossomed out this past year and become very popular. The company laid out several courts and they are filled to capacity every good night.

Movies, golf, basket-ball games, baseball and football in season, tennis courts, amateur theatricals, croquet. No need to be dull. You can wallow in an impenetrable fog of ennui in a 34th Street boarding-house in New York. And you can hit the pace in Milltown on the Chattahoochee! Geography has nothing to do with enjoyment.

CHAPTER VII

CHURCH AND A FEW CALLS

SUNDAY is a good day to go to church, in our little towns along the Chattahoochee. They do not have Sunday baseball games, neither do the theaters run. It's the Sabbath, and looks like the Sabbath. I saw only one store open anywhere.

So I went to church, too. It was the Methodist Church and right across the square from it was another one, no doubt of a different denomination. Both of them are built right up to the sidewalk with no grounds or planting to speak of. The right kind of Christian church has always been built by poor people, not millionaires. But I missed a flower bed.

I had seen the worker in the mill at work in the mill, at play and amusement, and where he lived. Perhaps I could learn something more about him at his church. A good many of them go to church. Judging from what they told me about membership, something like a third of the population are members of a church. If a third of the population of Boston or New York were active church members, think what would happen to automobile dealers and golf clubs.

I went in just before the morning service and the Sunday School was in full swing, in anterooms, and up in

the balcony. And there was a big class of men in a room off the main one and there wasn't room for any more to get in.

The main room of the church was wider than it was long and the preacher's platform, with the pulpit at one end, was raised only about a foot from the floor. He was right down among his congregation, not up aloft and aloof. The choir sat behind him and there was music from a piano.

It was a glummish sort of day, what we call in Boston 'misting.' But it didn't hurt the attendance. These were not 'fair weather Christians.' They seemed glad to come and happy to be there. They really acted as if they were in church instead of at a pink tea or a musicale.

The preacher was a big man, with a strong, determined jaw; a man's preacher. He moved about his pulpit as he warmed to his task, first on one side and then on the other. His sermon was about having a purpose in life, with liberal quotations from the Bible. He did not recite any poetry or tell any anecdotes. I remember we smiled only once at some little jovial twist he gave a phrase. He had a very attentive congregation, very. At the end he called on a layman to give the prayer. This was new to me.

Some of the writers who write with a carpenter's pencil have said that the preacher of the Southern mill districts is a pretty poor churchman in many instances, that he

gets his pay from the mill managers, and is thus subsidized and becomes little more than their tool. Using a fine-pointed fountain pen, as I do, I cannot imagine any great group of men dedicated to preaching the word of God that would not contain a considerable number who would cheerfully tell any interest to go to Gehenna, if they thought it was not a good interest. But, says somebody, where there's smoke there must be some fire. Perhaps. But some people think the whole of Babylon's a-burning, when it's only a flivver going downhill with the brakes set.

All I could do about this was ask a few questions from people I knew would tell the truth. They told me that they get their salaries from the members of the churches. They are appointed by the bishop, in those churches that have bishops. If the church committee have heard a certain preacher and want him, the bishop will probably appoint that man, just the same as he does anywhere. Also, the people own their own churches, and have built them themselves with their money.

The people, so I gathered from bits of stray conversation, are really interested in their preachers. They talk them over and compare them with others. The minister supplies a definite, genuine need with these folks. The South has been called Bible-land. If so, it must be a good place to live in.

In the afternoon I made some calls. I wanted to get

into two or three houses and see what was what. This involved a little diplomacy and as my stay in the Valley was to be rather short, I called in the services of a man who has been a mill worker himself for quite a while. Together we would be able to go about and talk (or better still, to listen) to some of the mill people, without making them shy. It would be very casual. Being casual is an art, and you either have it or you haven't. It consists largely of not looking too interested. I have been sometimes mistaken for a waxwork in a museum, and I haven't the courage to walk into the Mummy Department of the Egyptian Museum lest the onlookers think one of the exhibits has come to life.

Well, anyway, a casual friend and I took a Sunday afternoon stroll. It was rather embarrassing, walking up to the first door of a strange family and knocking on it. This was to be first-hand observation, the heart of the institution I had come so many miles to see. I confess it was more important to me than all the auditoriums, monuments, brick buildings with giant machines, and, in fact, everything else I had seen. The actor is always more vital than the theater he plays in.

A small, slender man opened the door and invited us in. I was much embarrassed. But the welcome was real and we pulled up chairs around the cheery grate. It was a typical front room. Straight back wooden chairs, an iron bed and an open fireplace. A room about twelve by

fourteen. There were no pictures on the walls. A linoleum art square was on the floor.

There were three persons in the room, all workers in the mill. The first man wore a blue shirt without a necktie and the overalls of the week day. He had a tooth or two missing in front and he spoke in a small, low, whimsical voice. I liked him.

Another man sat in the middle and he never opened his mouth or made a sound or moved during the whole visit. And finally there was the first man's wife, rather pale, but good-looking.

It was just a visit. We talked back and forth of many things, of cabbages and kings (or collards and the mills!).

'It's dull now,' said the first man in answer to my friend's question of 'how's things,' a good self-starter for talk. 'Yes, sir, dull. I wish the mill would run full time. When it doesn't, it's hard. You can't make enough to live on unless you work full time.'

I afterwards found out that both this man and his wife had had severe sickness, and been operated upon. It was Sunday and the intermittent gusts of conversation turned to the new minister.

'I like him,' said the woman. 'He seems to mix in and there's nothing stuck up about him. The other one before him — well, he never called on us.'

'I like him better than the other one, too,' said the man.

'They ought to go around and see people,' went on his

wife. 'They hadn't ought to be stuck up. I may be poor — but I'm just as good as anybody.'

She was a little belligerent in attitude and word. She resented a fancied snub, or high-hat treatment. She was sensitive.

The man asked us if we would like to listen to a new phonograph record he'd bought and he put it on the machine for us. He played both sides of it and we all sat and listened and stared into the ruddy coals in the grate. And then he brought out a picture of one of his grown-up children for us to admire. It was mounted on an embossed gilt folder. We admired it. I passed around cigars. Nobody smoked but myself. And finally we got up and shook hands all around. Even the still man shook hands. We went out.

'Well,' said my friend, 'that was an average home.'

'Average?'

'Yes. There are some better, some not so good.'

'They know you pretty well.'

'Sure. I was one of 'em. I worked quite a while in the mill. I was an overseer and could have stayed — but I wanted to do something else.'

'What do these people make in the mill?' I asked him.

'The man is a calenderer. He makes around $14.40 a week. His wife is in the cloth room. I think she makes as much as he does.'

'Well, let's go in another house. It's easy getting in with you along.'

'Yes. They know me. I've been one of them. They're fine people. You observed what she said, that she was as good as anybody. And her chin was up. Well, here's a house. We'll go in here. This man has quite a family. He's a baler and he makes about $15.50 a week — or something like that.'

We knocked on another door at a similar house in the same neighborhood. It was opened by a very tall, gaunt, big-boned man, wearing a sweater. His eyes were deep and black and his face was as rugged as that of Henry Clay. He looked something like him.

We went in that house. We sat in the front room again and there was the same kind of a fireplace. There was the man's wife and a couple of children, one of them a little girl who sat in the lap of her father. He was chewing tobacco and he spat into the fireplace every minute or so — and sometimes he missed. Every time he did so, he had to maneuver the little girl's head and it seemed rather difficult to chew tobacco and hold a child at the same time. I gave him a cigar to solve what appeared to be a difficulty, but he said he would save it for after supper. So I gave him another for immediate consumption, and he lighted it with great relish.

The man's wife was rather pale and had large, prominent gray eyes. She sat by the side of the glowing fire

with her hands folded. And the big man talked a lot. He seemed a very affectionate father, petting the little girl all the time. And there was an overfat little dog with a pointed nose and soft eyes who sat under my feet. We admired his best trick, which was being a dead rabbit.

The man told of his boyhood and how he had been raised on a farm. He'd worked intermittently on a farm and in the mills. And finally he quit farming and worked in the mills all the time. Talk drifted to the mill and my friend asked him how he was getting along.

'I'm almost out of debt,' he said. 'I owed the company three hundred and sixty-five dollars. I've got that all paid back except thirty-eight dollars. I sure do appreciate their kindness. They've treated me all right.'

I put in an oar. 'Had you rather work in the mill than on a farm?'

'Farmin's all right. But I'd rather be here in the mill. I can give my children an education here and that's what I couldn't have done on the farm, way back there in the country. This is a good place to live.'

A boy came in and sat down in the group. He was, it turned out, just fourteen and he began talking about getting a part-time job in the mill. He looked a little underweight but he claimed, loudly, that he wasn't. He spoke in a nervous manner. He didn't seem temperamentally fitted to work in a place where there were so many moving belts and wheels.

His father put him off. 'Not just now, son. Better wait a while.'

We stayed there for half an hour and finally went out, again shaking hands. Cordial, sincere hands. Very hospitable these people were, said they were glad to have met me and I think they meant it.

It was getting dark. The lights were going up in the windows, all over the sprawled-out village. Drab lines were softened by the magic of deep dusk.

'Thank you,' I told my friend. 'It has been illuminating. And these are — average homes?'

'Just average. Some, of course, are better, some not so good. But I thought I'd show you just some average ones of people who have just average jobs in the mill.'

We parted and I went to supper at a larger house which welcomed me more than once. There was a perfectly appointed table with some delightful Southern delicacies. But my evening was somewhat spoiled because I took the wrong iron somewhere and found myself left with a salad fork instead of a spoon.

I must have been thinking about something else.

CHAPTER VIII

TOWELS BY THE MILLION

NEXT day I saw a building that every normal small boy would love to throw rocks at. Especially boys who have dirty faces, and are happy about it. It was the big mill where they make washcloths, towels, and bathmats. Miles of 'em. If all the washcloths and towels they make in a year were placed end to end, why they'd clean all the dirty faces from Siam to —— Oh, well, I started to make something statistical and picturesque, but you know what I mean. They make an awful lot of towels and face cloths.

This is the Fairfax Mill. It is, with its house groups, perhaps the prettiest of the West Point group of mills. It is perched on a slight eminence with a magnificent view of the surrounding country.

They start off the cotton on its journey from bale to finished product in the same way they do when they have duck to weave. Men and women, young and old, carefully minister to its different stages up to the loom. From then on the work is far more picturesque and colorful. It was so attractive I was seized with a desire to peel my coat and get in on it.

Walking between the throbbing, rushing looms you find yourself murmuring 'ohs' and 'ahs' at every one. Here is a loom turning out a pattern called 'The Garden

of Allah.' Camels and pyramids on a border, with the rising sun and palm trees. In yellows and greens, beautiful pastel shades. And here is another. A brave blue ship sailing on some astounding billows.

Here is a futuristic sun splashing clear across a big bath-mat. It is pink on white. Quite a warm one to step on after getting out of the tub. Here are protective covers for the New York Central Lines. Mats and towels for hotels in Miami and New York, the name woven into every one. (Some of these will be hooked mats and towels later. Light-fingered hotel guests do so admire art of this kind.) Every loom seems to be doing a different design. Wonderful colors being woven by unseen hands. Like magic.

I walked through this great mill and marveled at the giant thing that has taken the place of the old lady at a hand-loom, running off her few inches of homespun in a day. It is amusing to think that every step in this essentially feminine thing has been made and improved by a man! It must be a terrible blow for a feminist to go through a mill, and think of how it all came about.

One man I did not envy in this big place of towels. He sat in a room of the bleachery and slowly manipulated five thousand feet of wet toweling into a vat. His seat was a board perched over the vat and his job was to get all that mile of towel laid as it should be, with no kinks or tangles to bother when it should be drawn out for the

next process. A wettish, foggy sort of job. A night in London would be practically crystal clear for him.

At the opposite end was a man who had one of those jobs which arouse envy and awe in the hearts of even some of the mighty. He has had his moments, too. Nothing less than the eye of the movie camera has been upon him and immortalized the thing that he does with incredible art upon a maddeningly secretive machine. He punches out the designs which are to be on bits of cardboard, strung together. They look like pieces of player-piano rolls. And the tune they play is in color and line upon the beautiful mats and towels. They fit these punched out cards on the looms somewhere, start the juice, and out rolls a towel with a design on it.

I watched him. He explained it. It is still a secret as far as I am concerned. But I saw the flat pieces of player-piano rolls on the looms and saw the designs come out, so I know he must be a genius.

I got a mild shock going through this and other mills. It could be left out, perhaps, but it's interesting and puts a little detail in the picture. I noted cardboard boxes filled with sawdust at strategic points near many machines. It looked as if tobacco juice went there, propelled by pretty good shots. But — women were sitting at those machines!

They were snuff-chewers. Mostly older women. I did not see any flappers at it. The younger generation expresses itself with tonic, peanuts, and yams.

I wanted to see a boarding-house. There are two or three in the town of Lanett. I told the nurse about it and she invited me to go along one afternoon as she had a patient with some ailment who lived in one of them. This one was quite a big house. It had sixteen rooms and took care of thirty-odd boarders and roomers. It had columns up the front and a big screened piazza all the way across. Nobody slept on this. They preferred to sleep inside, sometimes three or four in a room.

There was a front room and we went in. Two men sat there, staring into the fireplace. They were not reading or listening to the radio because there wasn't any radio. They just looked into the fireplace. They were night workers in the mill and just waiting for the afternoon to turn into night, and then they would go to work.

I walked all around and into the rooms which were empty, the occupants being at work. They were just sleeping places. The tenants hadn't left anything behind to give any indication of themselves. They might have been men or women who slept there — you couldn't tell. Sexless rooms. Characterless cubicles.

In one of them were three beds, two double ones and a single one. It didn't seem as if anybody would ever sing in any of them or do anything but become unconscious for a stated interval. All the beds were covered with patchwork comfortables.

There was a big dining-room which was, of course,

empty except for the long wooden table and chairs. Just table and chairs. No flowers on the table.

Board and room cost six dollars per week here if you stay all the time. Transients pay seven dollars per week. The transients are mostly special mechanics who come to fix machines that the mill mechanics can't. I was told by several that the food was quite good and there was plenty of it. But I didn't have a meal there or see one.

Boarding-houses seem to be cheerless places anyway, east or west of Suez. I've devoted enough space to this one. It's a chance for some woman who knows the job. There aren't many of her, but I've boarded with a few of them.

We drove out to see the dairy. It supplies most of the milk used in the five towns. There were seventy cows, and some thirty-five were being milked when I went in. Electricity was used to get the milk. The floor was cement and everything was clean and neat, cows, equipment, and barn.

We saw the milk cooled and bottled. It was not pasteurized. All the cows had names — Rose, Agnes, Fanny, and so on. And if Rose, Agnes, and Fanny come down with any disease, it is just too bad for the man who runs the dairy, because the medical inspectors are hard-hearted about a thing like that. They visit often and see that the stock is kept Grade A, just like the milk.

Speaking of milk reminds me of water! So just a word

about that. The water used all over the different villages is the old Chattahoochee changed so you'd never know it. It's as muddy as sin, but when the very excellent filtering plant gets through with it, no diamond could be more crystal clear. It passes the State test one hundred per cent.

I drove around Langdale this day. It was an aimless sort of drive, a peek at this and a peek at that. But the car stopped abruptly at a junction of streets and right ahead was the cemetery.

I hate to say so, but this is about the only thing in all my travels about the big enterprise that really depressed me. Not in the sense that any cemetery saddens one, but because this one is not very well done.

In a stretch of country where almost every rolling rise or gentle vale is beautiful, the spot selected is ugly. And the graves seemed shoved up to the very road. The spacing of walks and the planting are pretty badly done. It is very crowded, too. I could not feel as reverent as we should in the presence of all these dead.

A small matter, perhaps, but the whole piece of cloth must be looked at.

CHAPTER IX

WHAT'S BEING DONE FOR THE YOUNG FOLKS

From the country that once was Russia we are beginning to get inklings of what can happen to children when they are neglected and really forgotten. It is not a pretty picture which comes filtering to us through iron-bound Soviet censorship.

It is said that hordes of wild children, nobody knows how many, prowl like ghouls in search of food and warmth. They frequent railroad stations in the winter and curl up in any place where they won't freeze to death, and always they are seeking food. They seem in the way of becoming wild beasts if this condition is allowed to go on. Neglected, unwanted by anybody, these legions roam from place to place, thieving and existing by their young wits. Wild children!

Now forget Russia, and turn to Alabama.

In these five villages, if anything is stressed, it is the idea of giving a full, running-over measure to the young people. Everywhere I ran across this. In ten years from now, the youngsters of this valley will have added a new color to the whole picture, brought it up to a more intelligent, more independent status. They'll have a viewpoint, a tempo, and an ambition which their parents never knew.

Outside of the schools, which have their social and

athletic activities, are those really splendid movements — the Boy Scouts and the Girl Scouts.

I visited the big camp of the Boy Scouts, located some two miles from West Point. A side road led right into the heart of what looked like a small village of log cabins and a few larger buildings. It was magnificent country, well wooded, and just the sort of layout that healthy, red-blooded boys love.

There was a good-sized swimming pool at one end with bathhouses, showers, springboards, and so on. It was big enough to take care of scores of lads.

Not far away was the Assembly Hall, and the big Mess Hall. And up on a rise overlooking these buildings were the rows of sleeping cabins. There was also the Sanitary Building, containing showers and other necessary equipment. And near by was the Museum where specimens collected by the Scouts were housed and catalogued. And here in this great place of over three hundred acres, three hundred and sixty-five Scouts gather — one boy for every day of the year.

At stated intervals the Girl Scouts take it over and enjoy week-ends and a vacation. But it is mainly for the use of the boys.

These boys are divided into fourteen troops. West Point is represented as well as the five towns in Alabama of the mill group.

Mr. Bradshaw, the Scout Executive, told me that some

BASKET-TOTERS

DINNER TIME

GIRL SCOUT LITTLE HOUSE

SCOUT SWIMMING-POOL, PINE MOUNTAIN

seventy per cent of the boys have signified their dissatisfaction of having *only* a high-school education. They want to go to college. They have seen other boys a bit older, who have had the advantages of a higher education and what it has done for them. They intend to follow in their footsteps.

The boys get to camp on trucks owned by the mill, as some of them would have a fine fourteen-mile walk otherwise. All the troops have town headquarters, located in the Athletic Buildings or in some part of the various Auditoriums.

The Girl Scouts have something which I think is bound to have a tremendous effect on the village life in the future. This is the Girl Scouts' Little House, located in Shawmut. Here the two hundred young members gather to get acquainted with every branch of Home Economics.

It is a most attractive little cottage of five rooms. There is a big living-room, bedroom, kitchen, and reading-room — all of them completely furnished. And here the girls can see a home kept as it should be kept, something they may not have seen before. There is little doubt that this admirable little home gives an inspiration and an ambition that is never to be forgotten.

I realized keenly in my visits in the homes of the villages that something like this model home was needed. So many interiors showed no indication of that touch which makes a house a *home*. Why? We must go back

again to those country farms which seem to have so much to do with the problem. Poor people from the country have never seen anything, perhaps, but the crudest cabins and most rickety furniture. They don't know just how to go about making something better after they get into a mill house. A mill house is just like any other house; it won't decorate its own interior.

I have heard incredible stories about some families who drifted into town from the backwoods. They met bathtubs for the first time. And more than once the nice, shiny, white bathtub, which looked like a big dish, was used to salt down a hog in! Well, they use them in New York City to mix cocktails, or so the story goes.

The Girl Scouts' Little House and its work is very practical, very worth while.

All these things done by the Company for its boys and girls seem significant. The Company, if I haven't mentioned it before, pays the major part of *all* educational institutions, and in some instances the entire cost. Would labor unions do as much, or do it as well? In the face of all the rumors that fly around, wouldn't it seem silly to believe that this particular mill company is trying to exploit its people by educating their children up to the limit? My observation suggests that better things were coming — and, quite significantly, coming from within and not from without. Educated people help themselves. They never need any hat-holders, or windy self-starters.

They certainly don't need walking delegates to tell them how to make a living.

Red is a color one is bound to hear mentioned down in Cotton-land. It's a nice color, viewed *as* a color. But, I have observed, the Southern mill worker likes red only when it is combined with white and blue. No little bird told me that. It was a book, quite a thick one, and the only things in it were the pictures and records of the boys in these mills who went to France a few years ago and fought like tigers for this rather well-known color combination.

CHAPTER X

THE DRIFT FROM THE FARMS

ALL of us Northerners hear a lot about 'these Southern mill people who came from the hills and farms.' I knew it would be interesting to go out and see what the farms and mills looked like and why so many folks have left them.

So I hired a Chevvy and went. There was a whole lot to see, including a staggering number of horrible examples in the way of abandoned farms, and many about to be abandoned.

And I heard any number of reasons *why* these farms have been left, as sad reminders of hopes and ambitions unfulfilled. But for the life of me I can't tell you any one big reason. It looks like 'just one of those things.'

Everything is blamed: the Civil War and its after-effects; the boll weevil; the farmer's own lack of initiative, get-up-and-git; his lack of real, scientific knowledge of how to run a farm; sharks and sharpers who have financed the poor farmer and played tricks on him.

Something is wrong somewhere, perhaps as rotten as things were in Denmark. Take a motor trip through upper New York State, or any of the New England and Middle Western States, and then come down in the land which lies about the Chattahoochee with your weather eye cocked for big red barns, snappy white farmhouses,

and round-bellied silos. And when your weather eye has made comparisons it will be searching for the 'why' just as mine was.

We hear much about Farm Relief. The Southern farmer has been relieved here all right. Relieved of his farm.

I drove out through two counties one Saturday afternoon with a man who knew both farming and farmers. We drove fast and he talked fast and I tried to listen fast. We left the main highway and plunged off into the country, down a wide, red dirt road. Farms began to show up at once, on both sides of the road.

'Are all these little shacks farmhouses?' I asked. 'Do you mean to tell me that whole families lived in these — these boxes?'

'Some of them are tenant houses. Some of the old ones were homes for Negro workers.'

As homes, they were pretty bad. Weather-beaten and rotting in some instances. They didn't look as if they ever had been painted. Some of the small ones had just one room or two rooms. But there were cotton fields and corn fields here and there. Much of the land looked uncultivated.

'You can see the results of erosion all around,' said my friend. 'Land run out and neglected. Nature is trying its best to bring it back. All this land, even that with the small trees on it, has been planted at one time.'

I asked about the soil. It was all this peculiar brick-red color, and from a New England point of view, just about rockless. Fascinatingly rockless. It looked as if you could stick a plow in it, yell 'git-dap' and never have to turn out for a rock all day long.

'This soil? Why, it will grow anything. First-class vegetables and fruits, grain of every kind. You will see pecan groves, peach and apple orchards, even fig trees. No, there is nothing the matter with the soil when it's kept up. But that's one of the big troubles. Farmers have not put back the elements they've taken out of it. You see, there was so much of it, and it was so fertile, in years gone by. If you worked out one piece of land — well, there was a lot more just over yonder that didn't have to be fertilized. But now it has come to the point where much of it is bankrupt soil. It has got to be given new life.'

'Didn't they rotate crops at all?' I asked.

'Many a farmer who has failed has only himself to blame,' said my friend. 'He planted his sole crop, cotton, gathered it, sold it — and then sat down on the small of his back until next Spring, doing nothing for the soil he'd taken a crop out of. He was not a 365-day-in-the-year farmer. And rotation of crops? He'd never heard of such a thing. Cotton was easy, there was a ready and handy market. Why bother with anything else, even something that would bring back the land?'

This seemed to point out that it wasn't so much the

trouble with what Nature had put down as a workground but the man himself. There were, I learned, over 260 growing days in the year. That certainly was a gift to man.

The landscape began to change a bit as we rolled on. Instead of the bare brown cotton plants, we were catching glimpses of short green stuff growing where cotton vines had been.

'Now you're beginning to see something better,' said my friend. 'Oats, wheat, peas, vetch, and so on, growing. These farmers along here are waking up. Taking care of the soil and not planting cotton year after year in the same piece. They're in no danger of losing their farms or of having to let go.'

It was a bit more heartening to drive through country where the farms looked like farms. We saw what *could* be done. More than one farmer had seen what was necessary and solved the problem.

Still it seemed somewhat of a mystery why such good soil and such a splendid climate should present the general picture that was on every side. The abandoned farms. And for every home left to its fate, a family gone into the mills.

This, then, was where the big supply of mill help came from. And I had learned somewhat of the why of it. The failure at farming had given up trying to be his own boss and signed up with the mills. His worries were over, or so he felt. That awful bugbear, the end of the growing

season with its showdown of profit and loss, would not be looming up annually. There wasn't any 'season' in the mills. He risked nothing. What he got was velvet.

There was a real hook-up between the farms and the mills. The man who couldn't *grow* cotton decided to *work* cotton. Fewer cotton-growers and more cotton-workers. As farming troubles grew more varied and bothersome, more of these agricultural, unmechanical people flocked to the mills. There have always been more who wanted to get in than could be absorbed in the mills.

Such conditions as I have seen are not going unnoticed. Here is a quotation from the annual report of Secretary Wilbur of the Interior:

'Investigations made by the bureau of reclamation in the South have shown conclusively that this section of the country has all the material conditions for an attractive and prosperous rural life.

'It has fine transportation facilities and is near the largest cities of the country. The climate and soil make it possible for this region to be self-supporting in an agricultural sense and to supply some of the most needed and most valuable products of the country.

'It needs, however, a well-rounded agricultural program. There are many sections which should be hopeful and prosperous which now have a declining rural life. This is wholly due to economic and human conditions which can and should be improved.'

As I copy these words there appears in the newspapers a notice of the final drafting of a charter and by-laws for the $30,000,000 Cotton Corporation — fourth of the Federal Farm Board's gigantic machines for coöperative marketing.

This is to provide central marketing facilities and sales services, to buy cotton and cotton by-products, to develop a centralized finance system, and to lend money to its stockholding members. Each operation entails numerous ramifications, among which are the acquisition of physical facilities, the handling of cotton seed for planting purposes, and the schooling of farmers to adjust production to prospective demand.

These are hopeful signs. Looking over this whole picture, one would think that knocking a snappy living out of this marvelous land (it's very cheap to buy some) would be not too hard. Cotton has a ready market, whether you grow one bale or a thousand. And with soil and climate that will grow all fruits and vegetables, and pecans of the paper shell variety, and year-round pasturage for livestock — well, it does look easy, doesn't it?

But probably it's like that chicken-farm dream that so many bookkeepers and shipping clerks of the city have, those men who have facile pencils and who don't know a hen from a rooster. The plan looks good on paper, but it turns out so different. Something like the old German

who apologized for his piccolo playing: 'I blow it in so sweet, ach — und it comes out so sour!'

I guess that's the conclusion of the average, uneducated farmer who tries to grow cotton at a good profit. He blows in so sweet and it comes out so sour.

I said good-bye to this lovely, forlorn-looking land, with its shacks and unpainted cottages. But I couldn't help seeing a much different picture; a picture of what is going to be.

Some day this mellow, rolling land will be dotted with well-built, attractive farmhouses and trig, busy barns. The soil will be brought back. And a new race of farm-minded young men, men who know their onions, bolls, hogs, and other stuff, will make a real garden spot out of it.

There are some new buildings springing up now in this land I visited — and they are the most important of all. New and modern schools — consolidated schools they are called. These are the master-keys which will unlock the precious stores buried in the brick-red soil of the South.

CHAPTER XI

THE LAST WORD

This is the last chapter in the book, in which things always have to be tied up. I have tried to draw a picture of the mill worker in these five villages as he is to-day. Unfortunately I cannot show him as he was fifteen or twenty years ago, except from things told to me. Perhaps another reminiscence or two, gleaned from old-timers, may be illuminating.

I listened to what one had to say about his former life in the mills. He is not a mill worker now.

'I went to work in the mill when I was eleven years old. That was before the child-labor laws were passed. Times were pretty tough then. It was possible to put little kids six and seven years old to work in the mill. They were so small sometimes they had to stand on boxes to reach their work. The white people were treated miserably. If they lagged behind, the bosses would bawl them out and curse them.

'We went to work as soon as it was light enough to see. No hours. Just all day long. And the pay was, for the beginners, something like a dollar and a half per week. The people never had decent houses to live in. Just shacks placed too near together and uncomfortable to live in every way. In the early days the people lived in what they called "shot-gun" houses. These were built

in a straight line. Front door and right straight through to the back door. No toilets inside the house. And we got water from a pump. The houses were not ceiled and had only boards on the side. The wind could blow right through. Only the open grates kept you from freezing, and then you were roasted in front and freezing behind.

'It was sometimes the custom for the man of the house to send his children into the mills to work, while he led a life of fishing and hunting. Once such a man was sent a crude drawing of a coffin and on it was written "Git to work or git this!" He got to work.

'Yes, the old days were tough. No matter what anybody says, children did work in the mills. Nobody ever got an education. How could they? And nobody gave a darn about them anyway, whether they ever learned anything or not. Even now there are plenty of old gray-headed folks who can't read or write.'

He wasn't bitter; just stated these things in an even, matter-of-fact tone of voice. I have heard other stories something like this. Conditions were not so good forty years ago. I have seen a few of the old houses which are still standing and they are not pleasant to look at.

Progress has been made, lots of it. If the same rate of improvement goes on, in twenty years from now — well, the mill worker will be sitting pretty. That's in the hands of Destiny. For some peculiar reason the textile-mill worker has never yet been a highly paid worker at any

time, any place. He is no better off financially in the North; in fact, he is much worse off. But he is getting more than he used to get.

Is he happy? How can I answer that? If you who read this will place yourself first in his background, imagining yourself as he was — and then take the steps forward as I have pictured — and finally see yourself living as he does now — what would *your* reactions be? You can see it as well as I can, as well as any mere onlooker can.

Does he want more money and shorter working hours? Who doesn't? But I have a fairly definite impression that he wants the former more than the latter. There is no use trying to dodge such facts as these — unless we want to play ostrich and try a nice, comforting sand-bath for our brains.

Well, what's he going to do about it? First of all, he reads the papers. And if he can't read, Junior, who goes to school, can read them for him. He isn't a hermit or a clod any more, not by a jugful.

I have met a number of him and he is a man of engaging manners, capable of putting two and two together, a man of spirit when aroused, and, generally speaking, a religious man. If he has an air at times of not seeming to know what it's all about, lay that to his limited horizon and background, which are no fault of his. But now he reads the papers, big ones. He gets enlightening snacks of education from his children. He sees the most up-to-

date movies — and movies depict the modes and standards of living, no matter what else they do. He has the radio.

I have said no word in this book about the folks at the helm, sometimes vulgarly alluded to as the high muckamucks. But as so many eyes are turned on this picture just now, I don't see how the managers can hide behind stumps — nor do they wish to.

I have met them all, and talked of this with them. All they've told me to do was to go ahead and tell the truth about things as I saw them.

Well, so I have. And why shouldn't I say what I've observed about them? The managers are mill workers, just the same as the men who do it in overalls. And I have a very definite impression that the managers have a sincere desire to do all that is possible for the people who are, in the final analysis, their partners.

They can't make a Utopia all in a few years. They aren't magicians. But nobody with an unclouded, unbiased eye can look at all the visible things the owners and officers have established and say, 'Pish! 'Tain't nothin' at all.'

Every brick and stone in an auditorium or an athletic hall is a friendly gesture. It needn't, my dear cynic, have been done at all if they hadn't wanted to do it. They didn't *have* to help boys and girls to get a college education. They didn't *have* to build movie theaters and what not. They don't *have* to give a Christmas present to

every worker in the mill. They didn't *have* to bear the major part of the expense of having such good schools; they could have left the schools to shift for themselves.

Monsieur Coué never came down into the Chattahoochee Valley that I know of. But somehow I feel that he could have found his famous slogan, with a little variation, fitted right into the picture. 'Every day, in every way, things are getting better and better.' They're nowhere near perfect, that's a bet; but they are getting better.

In considering a subject like this, one can't go very far before he begins to hear a crackle and rumble, like static, in the offing. The Red Fog, it has been called; that movement which likes to lift a man up by his boot straps, and then give him a kick in the pants with the same boot. Are the Reds coming all the way down South to make trouble? Maybe the clairvoyants can say. I don't know.

I did visit a town where they had made a call, and left their visiting cards in the form of corpses in the cemetery, and men in jail. I couldn't learn much that was definite. People in that town talked in whispers and hinted at things, and seemed loath to come clean. But things seemed unrestful. The policemen wore guns strapped on the outside. I have seen the same in Lawrence, Massachusetts. It made you feel jumpy, moving around in a town where real trouble had been. And where trouble may come again. If the West Point mill workers are as

wise as they look, they will hang out a sign: 'No Bolsheviks Allowed to Come Here.'

The Bolshevik, or communistic labor leader, would like to turn our Southland into a branch of Soviet Russia. God forbid. He does to men and women and children's souls what the boll weevil does to the cotton blossom.

I was genuinely regretful at leaving the pleasant, beautiful Chattahoochee Valley and its mills so full of kindly folk. If the Valley had been ugly, going away would have been a relief. Towns have a flavor, just like homes. You delight to shake the dust of some from your feet. Others produce a feeling like that of meeting a real friend, a fellow you want to meet again. The place I lived in for a few weeks was of this kind.

There can't be much wrong with a place you'd like to visit again, and that you were given free rein to praise or criticize as you saw fit. I have both praised and criticized it, because that's the way it looked.

And now, as the old-time letter-writer used to say, 'Having no more to say, I will close.' I've told it as I saw it — the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

THE END

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I GO SOUTH

Harry Shumway

Because he had never been south of the Mason and Dixon line, because he knew nothing whatever about the cotton business, and because he was a good writer with an absolutely unprejudiced point of view, Harry Shumway was chosen to make an investigation of a group of Southern cotton mills. This book is his day-by-day report, written in entertaining fashion, and filled with graphic facts and figures.

An Unprejudiced Visit to a Group of Cotton Mills